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Viewing cable 08SOFIA87, BULGARIAN MILITARY MODERNIZATION PLAN POSITIVE BUT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08SOFIA87	2008-02-11 08:42	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Sofia

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.bivol.bg/wlarmy.html>

<http://balkans.blog.lemonde.fr/2011/05/05/et-la-bulgarie-renonce-aux-corvettes-francaises/>

http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2011/05/05/1085393_kak_se_pileiat_pari_v_otbranata/

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2017

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SUBJECT: BULGARIAN MILITARY MODERNIZATION PLAN POSITIVE BUT
MAY LACK LEADERSHIP TO IMPLEMENT FULLY

REF: A. A) 07 SOFIA 1122
B. B) 07 SOFIA 1219
C. C) 07 SOFIA 1271

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: A new Bulgarian Ministry of Defense plan for military modernization calls for a reduction of 3,000 to 5,000 service members, elimination or closure of certain unnecessary weapon systems and facilities, and the integration of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. The full details of the plan have not been made public, but information provided to the Embassy reveals a more positive and ambitious plan than expected. It is likely, however, that the Minister of Defense will not force difficult reforms on the services, and as a result, some recommended measures will be watered down and cuts may be made on the basis of political expediency rather than strategic rationale. The reduction in troops, for instance, may be achieved through attrition rather than targeted cuts of obsolete systems. Integration of the top-heavy and stove-piped General Staff into the Ministry of Defense is also likely to be only cosmetic (or skipped entirely) due to the Minister's reluctance to challenge the generals. The plan notably avoids taking a position on controversial procurements such as French Corvette-class ships or multi-role fighters. A delegation led by Deputy Minister of Defense Sonya Yankulova will travel to Brussels for meetings with NATO defense planners on 11 FEB. This is an important opportunity for the alliance to encourage Bulgaria to continue on the right track and to push for meaningful and targeted reforms, rather than unfocused cost-cutting. End Summary.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

2. (C) Mid-level MOD experts involved with the development of the plan have told us that approximately 9,000 positions will be eliminated as a result of the reforms, with around 8,300 of these cuts coming from the uniformed military and the bulk of these from the Land Forces. (Bulgaria's current armed forces number approximately 37,000 with the Land Forces comprising around 20,000.) The majority of the positions to be cut are currently unfilled. In other words, although 9,000 positions may be cut, only 3000-5000 actual service members would be let go.

3. (C) What is most significant is where these cuts will fall. The Embassy has made a steady push (Ref A, B) for Bulgaria to end its wasteful legacy programs such as submarines, coastal defense systems and out-dated air-defense systems that are incapable of differentiating between allied and enemy aircraft. Our understanding is that some of these programs will be cut back in the course of the reform effort but there is the danger that the majority of the cuts in personnel will simply be achieved through attrition. This is particularly problematic since our sources indicate that higher rates of attrition will occur at lower ranks, exacerbating an already top-heavy military structure.

4. (C) The integration of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff is the most ambitious portion of the MOD's plan, drawn from, its authors say, the best practices of other nations, particularly the United States and New Zealand. Clearly, a great amount of waste and redundancy could be reduced through this merger and the tremendous divide in culture and operations that currently exists between the two organizations could be narrowed or eliminated. According to the plan, a procurement office and an audit office/inspectorate would be kept independent, while other offices from the two organizations such as communications, travel, protocol, human resources, planning, policy, etc. would be merged. The new hierarchy is designed so that decision-making authority and consensus could be reached at lower levels. The State Secretary for Defense (a civilian) and the CHOD would be equals and would represent the two highest ranking officials beneath the Defense Minister and a single Deputy Minister. Predictably, the General Staff has opposed this plan, since it is seen as reducing the CHOD's status in the Ministry. The transition

to a structure with a single Deputy Minister (versus six in the current format) also ruffled feathers since many DepMins would be forced to accept a demotion in name if not any actual reduction in authority.

¶5. (C) Wisely, the authors of the plan did not make specific procurement recommendations in their plan, but

rather focused on what capabilities Bulgaria needed to possess in order to be an effective participant in international security operations. The stated goal is for 40% of Bulgaria's forces to be deployable, with six to eight percent deployed at any given time. (A rough estimate of Bulgaria's current situation is that two percent of its total or approximately 3.6% of its Land Forces are currently deployed overseas.) The planners suggested that Bulgaria ultimately wants to be able to deploy a full battalion and one company, and to do this estimates it needs a Land Force strength of five battalions.

WHAT IS THE MISSION: MILITARY TRANSFORMATION OR COST CUTTING?

¶6. (C) Prime Minister Stanishev ordered a revision of Bulgaria's "Plan 2015" for military modernization in October 2007. The public rationale was to re-energize the defense reform process and to update the five year-old plan which was seen as increasingly irrelevant. But behind the scenes, it was clear that Stanishev ordered the review with an eye toward reducing the share of GDP allotted to defense and buying time to respond to mounting French pressure on Bulgaria to purchase an over one billion dollar package of French ships. For the moment, it appears the PM has been successful in holding off the French. In December 2007, Bulgaria bought two used frigates and a minesweeper from Belgium instead, and Defense Minister Bliznakov said publicly that the Corvettes were not in Bulgaria's near-term plans. Still it was made clear to MOD's defense planning team that recommendations for transformation must involve troop cuts and base closures and should plan for shrinking resources. In its current form, the authors estimate the new plan will save approximately 70-120 million USD.

¶7. (C) Bulgarian planners (reporting to DepMin Yankulova) prepared a surprisingly ambitious plan which calls for substantial troop cuts, an integrated MOD and General Staff (based on a hybrid of the US and New Zealand military organizations) and a move away from decade-spanning, procurement-centric planning toward a shorter-term, capabilities-based planning model. While full details are not yet public, the thrust of the plan is forward-leaning and in line with Embassy advice to focus on interoperability, deployability, reducing waste, avoiding mega-procurements and maintaining niche capabilities.

¶8. (C) Although the authors of the plan continue to lobby for full implementation of their work, they have expressed doubt that Defense Minister Bliznakov (who has drawn the ire of his party's leadership and is perennially rumored to be replaced in the next cabinet reshuffle) has the will to push forward with far-reaching reforms. Others involved in the creation of the new plan suggest that, although Bliznakov is loath to make waves or push too strongly against the General Staff, he is also anxious for the plan to be viewed as a success. The concern is that "success" will be judged by top political decision-makers solely in terms of finances, without regard for the long-term consequences for the military.

THE ROAD AHEAD

¶9. (C) A delegation led by Deputy Minister of Defense Sonya Yankulova will travel to Brussels for meetings with NATO defense planners on 11 FEB. The following week the plan will be discussed in a Defense Council meeting of all Deputy Ministers and senior generals. Depending on the degree of friction within the Ministry, the plan is expected to proceed to the Council of Ministers for final approval in March.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: While the thrust of the Bulgarian plan is

positive, the measure of its success or failure will depend on the specifics of where troop reductions are made and which capabilities are maintained. The MOD appears to have internalized consistent embassy engagement on improving interoperability and deployability, reducing waste, avoiding mega-procurements and maintaining niche capabilities, as these themes are all echoed in the new plan. We strongly recommend that these priorities be reinforced during Deputy Minister Yankulova's visit to Brussels this week. Further embassy and NATO engagement will be necessary to present the strategic rationale for targeted cuts and to ensure that the positive measures outlined in the plan are not made meaningless or even counterproductive through poor implementation. END COMMENT.
Beyrle